

VZCZCXRO5789
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #1140/01 1241644
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 041644Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8734
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001140

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: BUTTRESSING THE INTEGRITY OF AFGHANISTAN'S
ELECTORAL PROCESS

REF: A. KABUL 891
[1](#)B. KABUL 993
[1](#)C. KABUL 1044
[1](#)D. KABUL 1136

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the UN, the international community, and Afghan government institutions are creating many electoral safeguards for the August 2009 presidential and provincial council elections. Much of the elections' credibility, for both Afghans and international stakeholders, will depend on the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Educating voters, candidates, and the international community on safeguards and building public confidence in the protections remains a challenge. The IEC's public outreach campaign does not ramp up until May. We will continue to encourage the UN, the IEC, and other appropriate organizations to promote and publicize these important protections for the electoral process. SEPTTEL will address the role of civil society in the election process. END SUMMARY.

THE IEC'S ANTI FRAUD MEASURES

[1](#)2. (SBU) Safeguards against electoral fraud start with the IEC. Indelible ink and the integrity of polling officials are the main protections against multiple voting. The IEC knows the importance of quality indelible ink and has engaged with UNDP to ensure the procurement meets the highest standards. Registration for provincial council and presidential candidates requires a set number of signatures and voter registration card numbers (ref A). The IEC is standing firm on these requirements. (Some candidates have asked instead to provide photocopies of the voter registration cards.) The requisite signature and card number allows the IEC to check that each card's information matches the IEC database allowing confirmation of authenticity. Performing the initial vote count in the polling centers with candidate agents and domestic observers present will reduce the risk of counting center fraud.

THE ELECTORAL COMPLAINTS COMMISSION (ECC)

[1](#)3. (U) On April 26, the ECC conducted its first meeting and named Grant Kippen as the ECC Chairman. The ECC is an independent body that adjudicates all challenges and complaints related to the electoral process (ref B). A 45 person secretariat supports the five commissioners at the Kabul headquarters; Provincial Complaints Commissions (PCCs) will represent the ECC in each province. The PCCs will accept complaints, investigate and make initial findings. Complaints can originate with any eligible voter, UNAMA regional offices and agents of political parties and candidates. The ECC will initiate cases, review PCC decisions, hear appeals and, if necessary for PCC security, investigate initial complaints. The ECC is working with its contracting agent and hopes to begin hiring for headquarters within the week, having already identified potential staff.

THE ELECTORAL MEDIA COMMISSION

¶4. (U) Article 51 of the electoral law requires the IEC to establish an Electoral Media Commission (EMC) 60 days prior to polling day. The IEC has identified five commissioners - including two women - and office space for the EMC. Once the office is equipped and functional - anticipated by mid-May, the EMC will begin operations - well ahead of the June 20 legal requirement. The EMC will establish and run a USD 2 million program to provide each presidential candidate with free airtime on radio and television, funded through the elections budget. The EMC will monitor mass media coverage of the electoral campaign, as well as review alleged violations in fair reporting and treatment of the political campaign period. Complaints the EMC determines are breaches of the Media Code of Conduct can be referred to the media commission of the Ministry of Information and Culture. In the 48 hours before voting day, the EMC will enforce the IEC-mandated media silence on candidates and political campaigns.

TRAINING & MONITORING THE MEDIA

¶5. (U) UNDP is contracting an independent company to develop an initiative to monitor media programs and provide feedback to the Afghan public on elections reporting. The project is designed to complement the EMC's work and focus on fairness, accuracy, balance, impartiality and lack of bias. The implementing company will provide regular reports on

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findings; sharpening the awareness of voters as to which media outlets are reporting on elections, and the quality and fairness of their coverage.

¶6. (U) To enhance media monitoring, UNDP plans to sponsor training and mentoring for journalists, broadcasters, editors and owners on providing responsible and unbiased coverage of the elections. UNDP will provide two rounds of training to take place in every province. The first round will focus on elections, covering the electoral process, candidates, platforms and ethics in politics. The second round will address fair reporting techniques highlighting the importance of balance, impartiality, and accuracy in elections coverage.

ELECTIONS WATCHERS IDENTIFIED

¶7. (SBU) Domestic and international observers are finalizing plans to participate in the electoral process. The Brussels review of the EU's report based on its exploratory mission on elections observation is pending, but initial feedback suggests the EU will deploy a long-term observation team around the country (ref C). OSCE's initial assessment suggested deployment of a 10-12 member support team for approximately five weeks. For bilateral observers, Japan is considering sending a team to Bamyan, while Australia may send election monitors to Uruzgan. We will continue engaging other diplomatic missions on possible bilateral observation teams. FeFA, the domestic observer body, plans to deploy roughly 8,000 election day observers (ref D). FeFA welcomes possible cooperation with the regional group ANFREL, of which it is a member.

¶8. (U) Afghan electoral law allows political parties and individual candidates to have registered agents at polling centers to observe election proceedings and the ballot count. Participation of these agents will strengthen the Afghan public opinion in the legitimacy of the election. UNDP will contract to provide training for candidate and party agents; cooperating with the IEC to identify linkages to the agent accreditation process.

VERIFYING POLITICAL RIGHTS

19. (U) In 2004 and 2005, UNAMA and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) implemented a political rights verification campaign to assess the political rights environment. UNAMA and the AIHRC have hired a coordinator to execute a similar review for the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections. The project's goals will be to: 1) monitor political rights and document violations; 2) identify trends of violations that prevent the exercise of political rights; 3) take preventative and corrective measures on individual cases during the electoral process. The implementers will draft three reports, one for each major stage of the electoral process: candidate nomination - including complaints and appeals; political campaign period; and polling day.
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